

AVALANCHE SAFETY CHECK LIST



BEFORE YOU LEAVE

- Expand your knowledge - take an avalanche awareness class.
- Avalanche beacons, probes & shovels? Know how to use them & practice.
- Check weather / avalanche forecast / local authorities.
- Develop broad mental image of the snowpack and danger you expect.
- Be sure your planned route is suitable for current and forecast conditions.
- Choose competent, compatible partners with similar ability, experience, goals.
- **Have several alternative objectives** to provide other options for success.
- Leave trip itinerary with family or friend.

IN THE AREA - Reassess all continually!

Human Factors - Are there issues that overshadow wise decisions?

- Trip Goals: Is a single objective (a summit, a slope) blinding you?
- Feeling too complacent, too familiar, invincible? Watch it!
- More people does not mean safer snow - avoid herd mentality.
- Objective not subjective decisions - don't base decisions on emotion.
- Are your sport skills outpacing your avalanche skills?

Reassess continually.

Terrain - Is it suitable for avalanches?

- **Slope Angle** - Measure it! (30-45 degrees are most common)
- **Slope Aspect** - Leeward? Wind-loaded? Shaded? Sun-exposed?
- **Slope Shape** - Convex rolls? Open? Bowl? Gully? Corniced?
- **Slope Anchors** - Vegetation, Rock outcrops, Benches: Are they anchors or weak points?
- **What are the consequences if a slide releases?**
- **Terrain Traps** - Narrow gullies, cliffs, crevasses, trees, rocks, creeks, lakes.

Reassess continually.

Snowpack - Might it slide? Is it unstable?

☐ Obvious Signs of Instability

- Recent avalanches on similar slopes.
- "Whumphing" sounds or shooting cracks.
- Consistent "Very Easy" or "Easy" failures upon testing.
- HIGH or EXTREME Avalanche Forecast Danger Level.

☐ Other Clues of Instability

- Fresh snow in the past 24 hours.
- Sudden temperature rise or first sunshine on new snow.
- Consistent "Easy" or "Moderate" failures upon testing.
- CONSIDERABLE Avalanche Forecast Danger Level.
- Moderate or low danger do not mean NO DANGER.

Reassess continually.

Weather - Has it, is it, or will it contribute to instability?

- **Precipitation** - Type, amount, intensity, duration.
- **Wind** - Windblown snow loading lee slopes, further stressing snowpack?
- **Temperature** - Rising temps or sun causing loss of snow strength?
- Prolonged cold temps causing faceting?

Reassess continually. Trends in weather are most important; be aware of potential changes with elevation.

TRAVEL - Reassess all continually!

- Avalanche beacon check at trailhead.
- Look at Terrain, Weather and Snowpack clues - speak up!
- Stay on ridge lines / flanks of open slopes.
- One person at a time crosses suspect slopes - cross high.
- Watch those crossing suspect slopes.
- Follow using the same track; move quickly between safe areas.
- Be ready to ditch gear that inhibits swimming motions: No pole straps or leashes; use releasable bindings.
- Continually look for escape routes - what if the slope releases?
- Choose safe rest areas & campsites - check for hidden tracks & runout zones - consult map.
- When descending, always stop off to the side of any slope.
- Maintain situational awareness and Reassess continually.

IF CAUGHT - Reassess all continually!

- Call out!
- Attempt to escape toward flanks (sides).
- Ditch awkward gear.
- FIGHT, swim, grab a tree or rock, self-arrest.
- Keep mouth shut.
- When slowing, make strong thrust toward surface.
- Push one hand toward surface.
- Make air pocket in front of face with other hand.
- Try to dig yourself out.
- Attempt to remain calm.

RESCUE - Reassess all continually!

- Organize, appoint leader, avalanche lookout, question eyewitnesses (plan beforehand).
- Note who is missing.
- Assess further danger.
- Identify escape routes.
- All beacons to "receive" mode.
- Establish and mark victim(s) last seen area(s).
- Search for surface clues - check them, then leave them in place.
- Focus search on major deposits and likely catchment areas below last seen area(s), around trees, rocks, bends in path, etc.
- Beacon Search

	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>
Phase 1	obtain signal	everyone
Phase 2	home in on signal	everyone getting signal
Phase 3	pinpoint signal	one searcher (others probe and dig)
- Probe for victim until strike is made.
- Manage digging so as not to re-shovel.
- Care for victim - First Aid ABC's - keep victim warm.
- All beacons back to "transmit" mode.
- Don't contaminate site with your equipment.